

Climate Change

What to think and what to do

4. Key Players, and Psychology

We don't inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.

Introduction

You need to get the bus from A to B, and its getting late.

- A drunk in the bus shelter says the bus to B is due in 10 minutes
- A bus arrives instantly. The driver says it's not going to B.
- A descending passenger whispers that this driver always lies, and it *will* go there next.
- A fellow on a nearby bench chuckles that the bus is making a noise that means its engine won't last more than another mile.
- A man strolls by calling out that all routes to B are flooded except a back route that buses can't use, and he has a taxi.
- Then a second bus arrives (it's been 10 minutes), whose sign says C, but driver says he'll stop at B and he thinks the road is probably open.

What do you do? Two points:

1. You can't verify all information yourself. You have to decide:
 - What *information* you trust
 - Whose *judgement* you trust
 - Who has what *expertise*
 - How to *weigh* the claims (could they be honest or expert - but wrong, or drunken - but right?)
 - How to weigh the *outcomes* from different choices and delay - are you checking out a new pub in B, or meeting the pope?
2. Anyone wanting to *stop* you succeeding has to work out *how to mislead* you.

And that's just getting a bus!

Key Questions

To make sense of the Climate Problem, we need to ask about

- Key Players
 - Who are they? Are they:
 - Competent?
 - Disinterested?
 - Being honest (the *whole* truth)?
- Human Psychology
 - **Why is no-one doing anything?**
 - How is our much-vaunted human capacity for rational thought leading to action failing us?

Key Players – involved in Climate Change

In *roughly* the order of engagement in the issue as a serious problem:

1. Activists and ‘Green’ Organisations
2. Scientists
3. Media
 - Though media *owners* are usually in 5
4. Politicians/Governments
 - Excluding those of major FF-exporting Countries (OPEC etc)
 - But also including General Business
 - And International Bodies (set up by Govts)
5. Think Tanks (lickspittles*)
6. The Super-rich and their (other) lickspittles (Tax advisors, Lobbyists, PR firms etc)
7. “Big Oil” (incl Gas & Coal) – both Corps and Countries
 - Including Intensive FF-Using Corps

***Lickspittle:** *“a service provider who earns \$1m pa helping a billionaire work at becoming a trillionaire...”*.
Crumbs off the master’s table. (Yes, a pejorative term, which I feel able to use because I was among them, before I was cured. As individuals, they are mostly good people: cf “*Swimming with Sharks*: Joris Luyendijk, on City of London culture, where money is THE measure of worth and virtue)

Key Players – 1. Activists and ‘Green’ Organisations

We’ll cover in depth in later sessions (on ‘What to do’), but a few comments:

- It’s a broad church
 - MLK was the reasonable face of Civil Rights, but there were more radical agents
 - Who never aimed to popular, but helped make people listen to MLK
 - A bit like XR, SchoolStrike, Insulate Britain, Just Stop Oil etc today...
- As things get worse, it’s a growing church - *all* are welcome
- As I’m trying to show, activism is *all there is* between us and Armageddon

Key Players – 2. Scientists

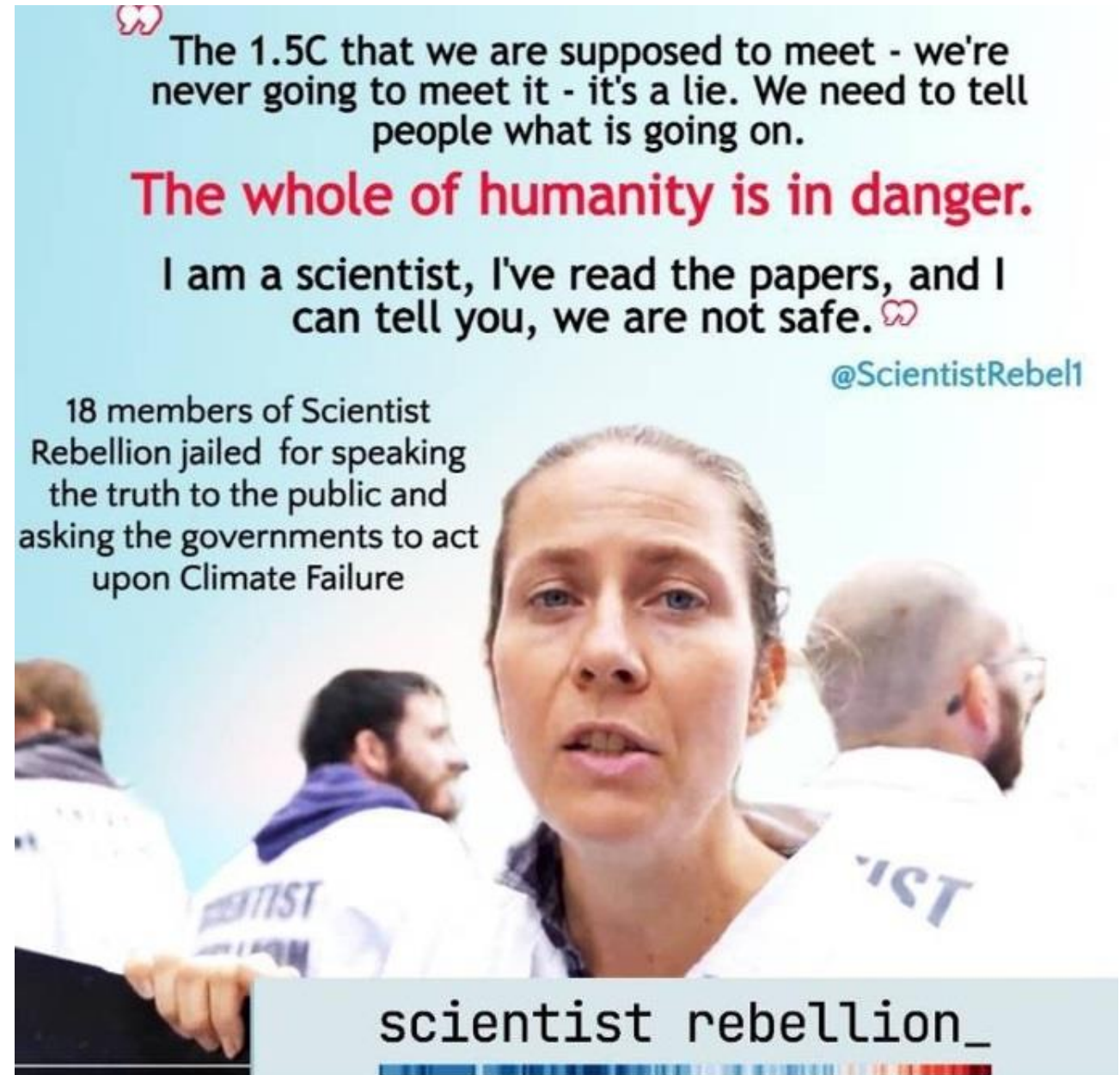
- The source of the famous “97% of scientists...” claim:
- [Quantifying the consensus on anthropogenic global warming in the scientific literature \(iop.org\)](https://iop.org)
2013 John Cook, Dana Nuccitelli, Sarah A Green, Mark Richardson, Barbel Winkler, Rob Painting, Robert Way, Peter Jacobs and Andrew Skuce. Universities of Queensland, Western Australia, McClellan CA, Reading, Newfoundland, George Mason University USA, BC Canada.
 - *We analyze the evolution of the scientific consensus on anthropogenic global warming (AGW) in the peer-reviewed scientific literature, examining 11 944 climate abstracts from 1991–2011 matching the topics ‘global climate change’ or ‘global warming’. We find that 66.4% of abstracts expressed no position on AGW, 32.6% endorsed AGW, 0.7% rejected AGW and 0.3% were uncertain about the cause of global warming.*
 - *Among abstracts expressing a position on AGW, 97.1% endorsed the consensus position that humans are causing global warming. In a second phase of this study, we invited authors to rate their own papers. Compared to abstract ratings, a smaller percentage of self-rated papers expressed no position on AGW (35.5%). Among self-rated papers expressing a position on AGW, 97.2% endorsed the consensus. .. Our analysis indicates that the number of papers rejecting the consensus on AGW is a vanishingly small proportion of the published research.*
 - *Despite these independent indicators of a scientific consensus, the perception of the US public is that the scientific community still disagrees over the fundamental cause of GW. From 1997 to 2007, public opinion polls have indicated around 60% of the US public believes there is significant disagreement among scientists about whether GW was happening (Nisbet and Myers 2007).*
- [The Cook et al. \(2013\) 97% consensus result is robust \(skepticalscience.com\)](https://skepticalscience.com)
- This work was done in 2013, shortly after the ‘great pause’ had run its course. One might expect *even stronger* consensus now.

Key Players, and Psychology

Key Players – 2. Scientists

Some scientists are getting frustrated and angry... turning to activism after 40 years of fruitless 'courteous debate'

They're doing their bit, why aren't others?



Key Players, and Psychology

Key Players – 3. Media

- Agenda
- Ownership
- Climate coverage
- Balance

Key Players – 3. Media

How does Media engage and keep us?

- Stories (the human interest/drama, not the big picture – anecdote ALWAYS trumps data)
- Novelty (so corrections are late and hidden)
- Immediacy – the urgent, not the important
- Exaggeration sells
- Speculation (House prices “could” fall by 30%!)
 - This is the norm with Climate stories
 - A scientist (wanting her 15 min of fame) reports research that says Glaciers melting
 - Journo asks ‘how long?’ Reply: ‘Anything from 10 to 100 years’
 - Print it as: “Glaciers *could* disappear in 10 years”
 - Leads to “crying wolf” strategy for ignoring those stories

Do these things matter:

- Money? (Most are businesses. BBC has political pressures. Guardian slightly insulated.)
- Truth? (Up to a point – must retain credibility – but often less important than money)
- Journalistic cognitive biases? (Yes – they’re human!)
- Balance? (Often badly done....)

Key Players, and Psychology

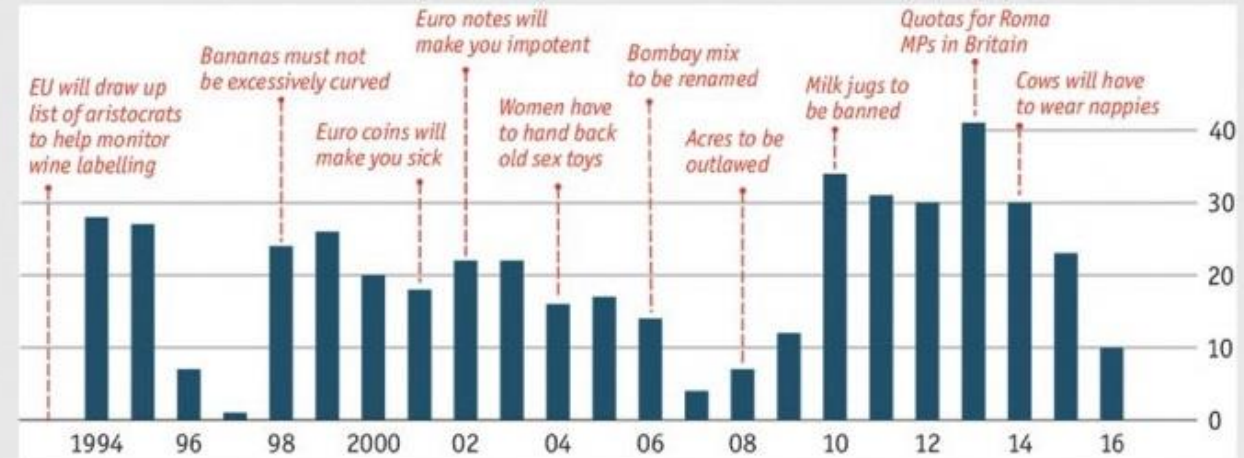
Key Players – 3. Media - Agenda

Any old nonsense, as long as it sells (illustrated with anti-EU nonsense)

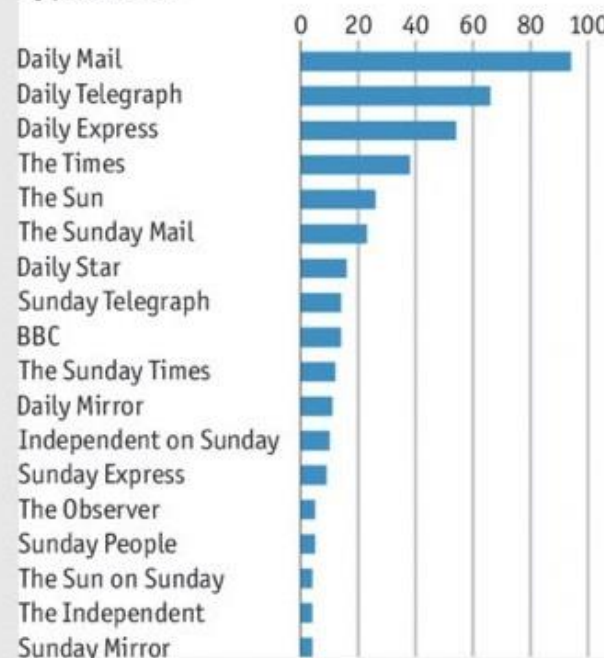
As noted, we look in vain for any retraction/apology, and if there is one, it's always buried

Lies, damned lies and directives

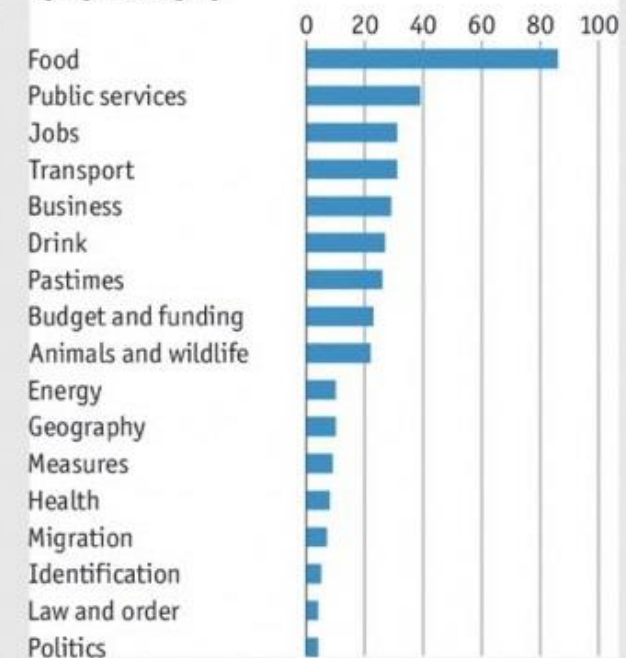
Number of EU myths debunked by the European Commission



By publication



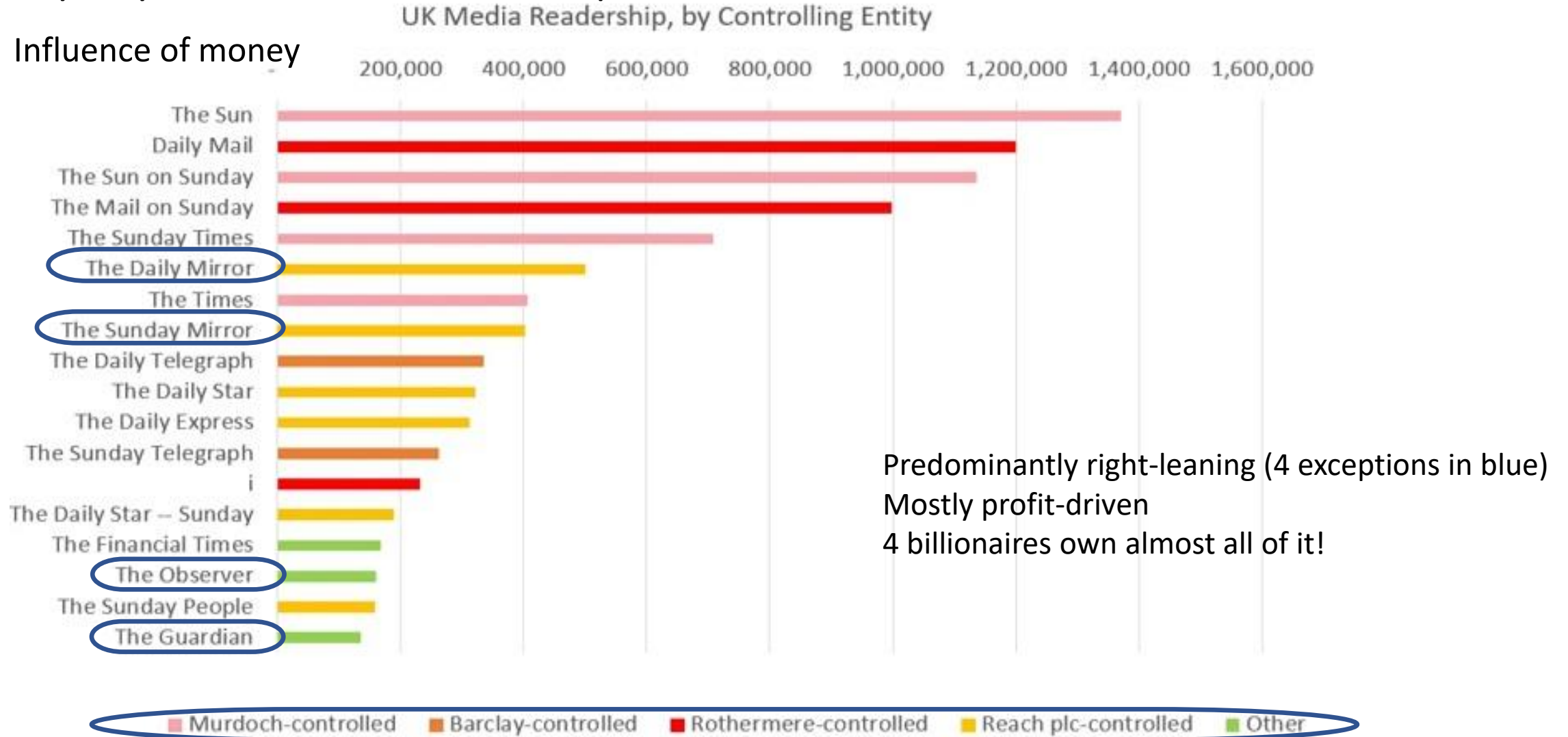
By myth category



Source: European Commission

Key Players – 3. Media - Ownership

Influence of money



Source: Statista; 99% analysis

Key Players, and Psychology

Key Players – 3. Media – Climate Coverage

[Media coverage of climate change – Wikipedia:](#)

Journalists distort reality by:

- making scientific *errors*
- keying on *human-interest* stories rather than scientific content
- *rigid* adherence to the construct of *balanced coverage*.

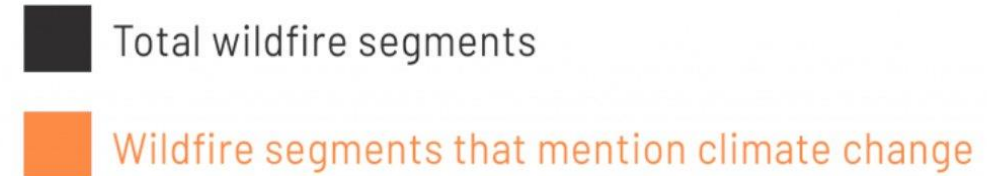
[Media Matters \(US\):](#)

- of 127 segments on the global heat wave that aired on ABC, CBS, and NBC in summer 2018, only one mentioned the connection between climate change and extreme heat.
- in the height of hurricane season in 2017, neither ABC nor NBC aired a single segment on any news show that mentioned the link between climate change and hurricanes:

[latest annual study](#) of broadcast coverage (2020)

Broadcast news coverage of California wildfires and climate change

Number of segments from September 5 - 8, 2020



We analyzed the major morning and nightly broadcast TV news shows.

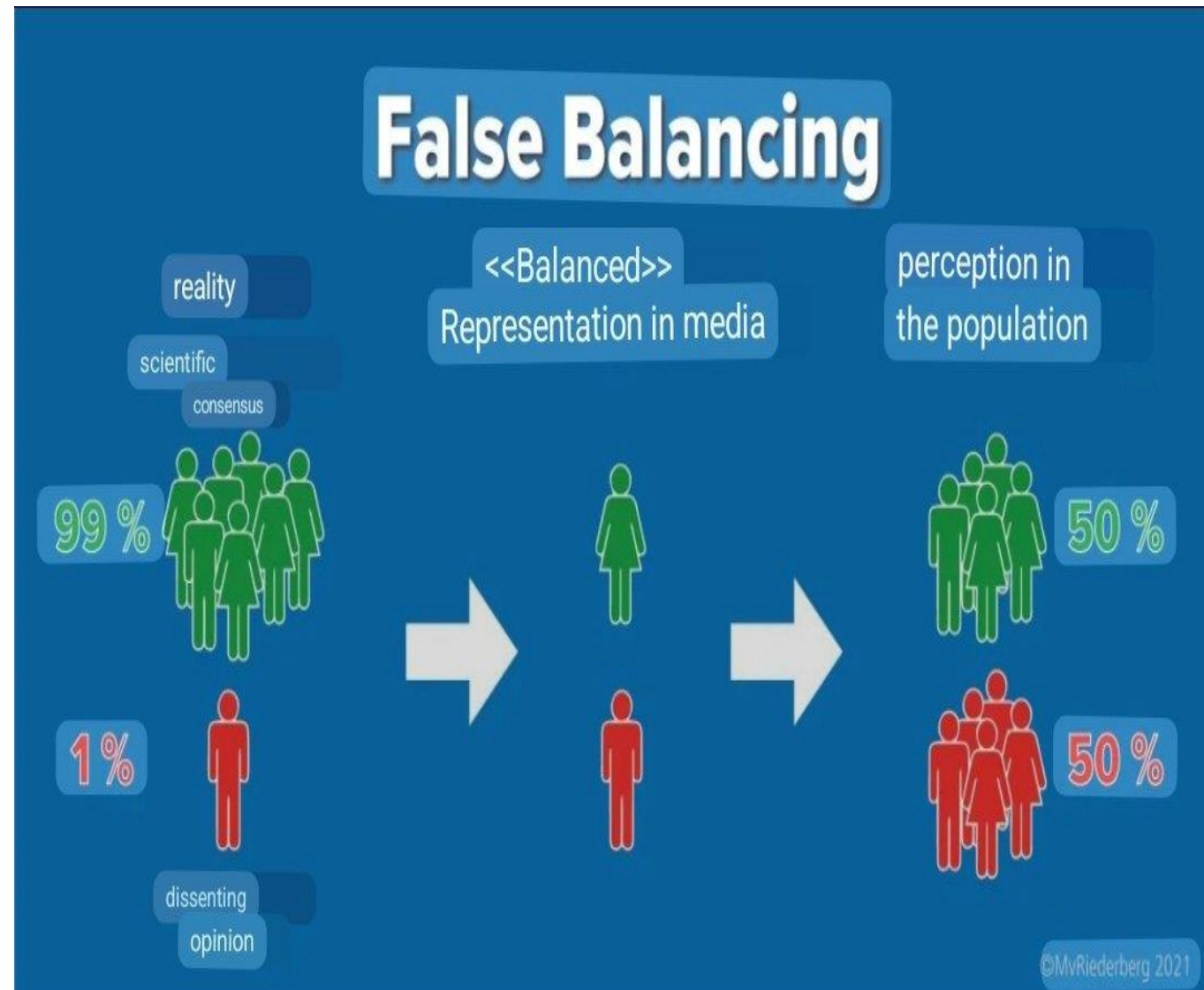
MEDIAMATTERS
FOR AMERICA

Key Players – 3. Media - Balance

- The pundit *always sounds more authoritative* than the scientist
 - Not bothered by ‘professional reputation’
 - Not schooled in ‘academic debate’
 - Skilful with sound bites

UK examples

- Julia Hartley-Brewer on QT very recently (“It’s called weather”)
- On Nick Robinson (BBCR4today): “*What makes [@bbcnickrobinson](#)'s comments so reprehensible, is not only that he's flat wrong, but he's heaping scorn & ridicule onto a young protestor fighting for her future based on sound science! It's a form of psychological abuse that [@BlancheVerlie](#) labels [#GreenhouseGaslighting](#)”: [Dr. Aaron Thierry](#)*”
- Lord Lawson, constantly on BBC until they finally adjusted their approach to ‘balance’



Key Players – 4. Politicians/Governments

Where to start?!

- Always and obviously: National Self-interest (Saudi sun spots...)
- Autocracies (mostly *not* very benevolent, usually kleptocracies)
 - though cf Haiti/Dom Rep tree line:
- Democracies
 - *“We know exactly what to do. We just don’t know how to get re-elected if we do it!”*
 - Election cycle time-frames very short
 - Electability requires “Growth”
 - GDP is an obsession, yet it’s a truly LOUSY measure of well-being
 - A car-crash increases it. But not unpaid care.
 - It has *nothing* to say about distribution or fairness.
 - Very few elected officials are scientists etc.
 - Electoral systems are rickety
 - Voters are very largely ignorant
- So, *even* in Democracies, ‘what happens’ isn’t ‘what would be good for *citizens*’



Key Players – 4. Politicians/Governments

- It was ever thus – “*what’s good for General Motors is good for America*”
- Where politics is driven by money, Business will have (undue) influence
 - Recent arrivals can be visible and brash (cf Elon Musk), or clumsy (cf Zuckerberg)
 - But the old players are shadowy and silky smooth on how this works
- “The ideas we hold as *axiomatic* frame what *other* ideas we are able to have”
 - Big Oil
 - Has always been awash with cash
 - Pay top dollar with lots of perks → high quality staff, then train them very well
 - Massive, complex projects hone problem-solving (and problem-hiding..) skills
 - These people are consulted by Govt over energy policies. Many are now IN government
 - Big 4 Accounting firms (used to be 8, who let through the consolidation??)
 - A near monopoly on the detailed expertise on how tax laws work
 - Hired to help draft the laws
 - Then hired privately to help evade them.
 - In both cases, the *ideas held as axioms* act as a frame
 - No thinking outside the box: “Imagine if we told the truth about Climate?”, “Imagine if we closed the tax havens?”
- The revolving doors – e.g. links between fossil fuel extractors, politicians, media etc
- Corruption is rife
 - London is the global money-laundering capital - [BBC Radio 4 - How to Steal a Trillion](#) (Oliver Bullough)

Key Players – 4. Politicians/Governments

- Governments *ought* to have real power to do what's good for citizens. They can make new laws
 - Sometimes Positive (eg NetZero commitments)
 - Sometimes Negative (eg Policing Bill)
 - But usually supine, until pulled by outcry – voters vote in a bad system twice a decade, lobbyists are on schmoozing every day
- *Autocratic* governments just decide what public opinion is going to be!
 - But they tend to shape it to retention of power above all else
- *Democratic* governments do *sometimes* lead public opinion (UK death penalty)
- But only where it's expedient, i.e.
 - cheap and
 - not threatening to them (even if a pain for the next lot)
- But 'revolving door' elites provide Politicians with many tools to retain elite privileges
 - Money
 - Talking Points (aka question everything, change the subject, tell a counter-anecdote)
 - Techniques for Delay, Deception, Deflection
- Where they *do* follow public opinion, this is due to
 - Electoral pressure (weak force)
 - Media shaming (strong force, but usually, shaming is driven by expedience – the Media are largely captured)
 - Civil unrest (strong force)

Key Players – 4. Politicians/Governments

We need Politicians to stand up... and say that the problem is the *axioms*..

Hope is all around us. Because all it would really take is one - one world leader or one high-income nation or one major TV station or leading newspaper who decides to be honest, to truly treat the climate crisis as the crisis that it is. One leader who counts all the numbers - and then takes brave action to reduce emissions at the pace and scale the science demands. Then everything could be set in motion towards action, hope, purpose and meaning.

The clock is ticking. Summits keep happening. Emissions keep growing. Who will that leader be?

Jonathan Porritt (*Hope in Hell*)

If truth is important, then prices that do not honestly reflect costs are a problem. When industries put pollution or deplete natural resources, they often do so without incurring any obligation to pay a fee proportional to the degradation of environmental quality or depletion of natural wealth. Economists call the shifting of costs (such as environmental costs) off of the Profit and Loss balance sheet "externalities". Externalities are the harmful impacts on the environment or society that do not show in prices.

Because prices do not show true costs, consumers do the wrong thing. We buy more of those things that harm the environment than what we would do if prices were honest.

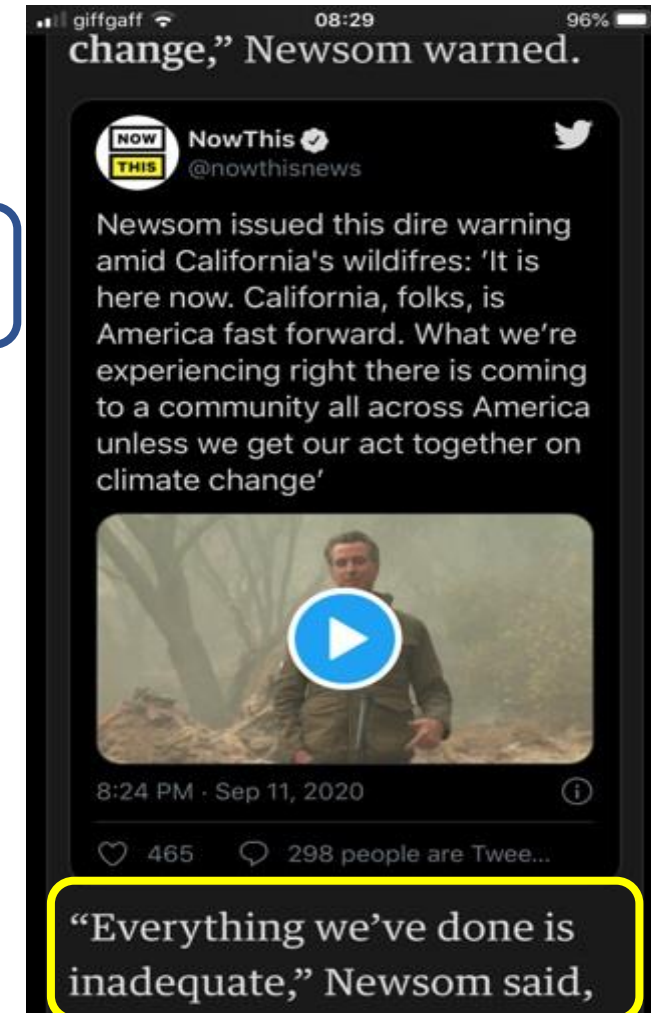
When corporations do not face substantial environmental impact fees, business planners adopt manufacturing processes and business models that are more harmful to the environment.

Dishonest prices harm the interests of future generation and the larger community of life. They make UN-sustainable business models appear as the more profitable option.

If we account for externalities by charging appropriate fees, pursuit of profit will be synonymous with pursuit of sustainable business models. Corporate interests and societal interests will be aligned rather than at cross-purposes.

gaiabrain.blogspot.com/2019/02

and *perhaps* this is starting



Key Players – 4. Politicians/Governments

But don't hold your breath

- The forces for inertia are strong, well funded, and embedded in Govt (Cf *Crude Britannia*)
- The default route to action is supposedly: events → public opinion → electoral pressure → change. But this mechanism won't work fast enough. And Politicians *will not* lead.

So, per Greta Thunberg's comment quoted in seminar 1 ("abandon the illusion that our politicians will come to the rescue"), and analyses of COP impacts, we can't rely on politicians sorting this out.

Yet, we CANNOT do it without them - because they have the power.

So all of us who 'get it' need to work to raise public awareness, and change public opinion, so that CC is the paramount issue when they come to vote.

e3g. “The IEA’s net-zero roadmap projects that \$5tn is necessary by 2030 to put the world on the pathway to a climate-safe world. It is maddening to realise the much-needed change could start happening now, if not for governments’ entanglement with the fossil fuels industry in so many major economies.”

Key Players – 4. Governments - International Bodies

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

- (under ‘Systems’ and ‘Evidence’, we’ve seen what the IPCC *says*, and *that* 27 COPs have not dented CO2 growth, but not *what it is*, or *why* so ineffective)
- an intergovernmental body of the United Nations responsible for advancing knowledge on human-induced climate change*
- Established in 1988 by
 - the [World Meteorological Organization](#) (WMO) and
 - the [United Nations Environment Programme](#) (UNEP)
 - later endorsed by United Nations General Assembly
 - 195 member states
 - Consequently, IPCC conclusions are pretty ‘Middle of the Road’
 - E.g. final moments of COP26 that had Sharma in tears – India “phase down” not “phase out” coal
 - Although recently its WORDS are beginning to be pretty unequivocal that we face meltdown here
- Provides
 - objective and comprehensive scientific information on ACC
 - including the natural, political, and economic impacts and risks, and
 - possible response options
- Does NOT conduct original research or monitor climate change
- Informative and authoritative, but essentially Toothless

*(aka Anthropogenic Global Warming or Anthropogenic Climate Change, AGW or ACC)

Key Players – 4. Governments - International Bodies

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

- Six 'Assessment Reports': 1990, 1995, 2001, 2007, 2014, 2021/2 – i.e. about every 5-7 years
- Inevitably 'watered down' in order to achieve a publishable consensus, but still the best comprehensive data
- First Report led to establishment of the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) (UNFCCC)

What is a COP? (eg COP26)

- A "conference of the parties" (COP) is the supreme governing body of an international convention (written agreement between actors in international law).
- To review progress and take decisions necessary to promote effective implementation
- So there are COPs for e.g. Chemical Weapons Convention, Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
- And more relevantly for our purposes:
 - [Convention on Biological Diversity](#)
 - [Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals](#)
 - [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#)
 - [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification](#)
 - [Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants](#)
- First UNFCCC COP: Berlin 1995, then annually incl
 - 1997 COP3 Kyoto
 - 2009 COP15 Copenhagen
 - 2015 COP21 Paris
 - 2021 COP26 Glasgow
 - 2022 COP27 Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt
 - 2023 COP28, Dubai (yes, F*ck\$%g Dubai)
- All COPs fail, some more abjectly than others

Key Players, and Psychology

Key Players – 4. Governments - International Bodies



Key Players – 5. Think Tanks

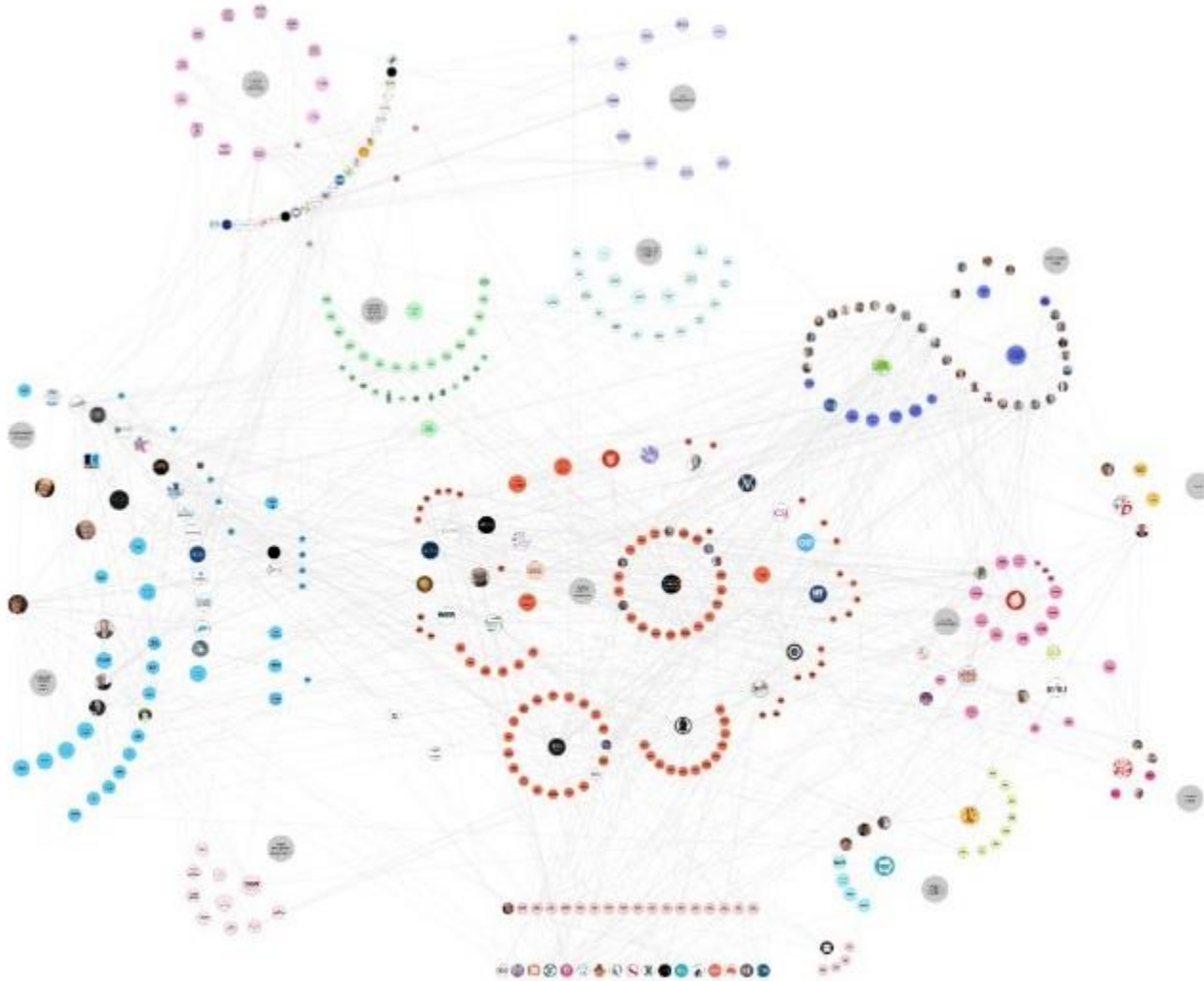
- Why do they exist?
 - Universal suffrage!
- Who funds them?
 - Those who prefer \$1/1vote to 1person/1vote
- These are UK think tanks:
 - Nb. IEA is also “International Energy Authority”
 - Global Policy Warming Foundation not rated
 - denied for a long time that it took FF money, until emails leaked showing it does...
 - If you don’t know what “55 Tufton St” means, time you did! Nest of astroturfing vipers
- In the US, the culture is more “it’s your money, you can fund who you like”, so transparency is very low, and the only concern is foreign funding.
 - So e.g. the infamous Koch brothers fund Politicians direct as well as Think Tanks
- Source: www.transparify.org 2016 (seems to have stopped flagging *opacity*, only *transparency* – perhaps they were got at)

THINK TANK	SCORE	COMMENT
Transparency International UK	★★★★★	HIGHLY TRANSPARENT
Tax Justice Network	★★★★★	
Overseas Development Institute	★★★★★	
Institute of Development Studies	★★★★★	
Institute for Government	★★★★★	
Institute for Fiscal Studies	★★★★★	
GODAN	★★★★★	
European Council on Foreign Relations	★★★★★	
Development Initiatives	★★★★★	
Amnesty International	★★★★★	
Royal United Services Institute	★★★★	BROADLY TRANSPARENT
ResPublica	★★★★	
New Economics Foundation	★★★★	
Institute for Public Policy Research	★★★★	
Fabian Society	★★★★	
Demos	★★★★	
Chatham House	★★★★	
LSE IDEAS*	★★★	
Centre for European Reform	★★★	
Centre for Economic Policy Research	★★	
Policy Network	★	HIGHLY OPAQUE
Policy Exchange	0	
Institute of Economic Affairs	0	
Civitas	0	
Centre for Policy Studies	0	
Adam Smith Institute	0	
International Institute for Strategic Studies	X	DECEPTIVE

* LSE IDEAS plans to disclose additional funding information in the near future.

Key Players, and Psychology

Key Players – 5. Think Tanks



This is Desmog's 2019 interactive resource on right-wing disinformation. **Click on it to expand and explore** (nb not the first, top, view of it on the website - you have to scroll down)

- Showing the myriad links between Climate Denialists and Brexiters – the point being to scupper climate action by effecting Brexit
- Shows the network of
 - **major US funders of climate science denial** including the Koch brothers and Robert Mercer, who also bankrolled Donald Trump
 - **free-market thinktanks**, many with UK links based at offices in and around **55 Tufton Street** (London)
 - **Big Oil and their lobbyists** (for FF cos, and those profiting from FFs) and **other lickspittles** like Cambridge Analytica, and
 - **UK politics** at the highest level – e.g. Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Farage, Kate Hoey, Raab, Arron Banks, etc. etc.

“They” won! (sort of..., thus far)

Think Tanks are not the only lickspittles. Why single them out? Because they exist pretty much *solely* due to, and to serve, the rich

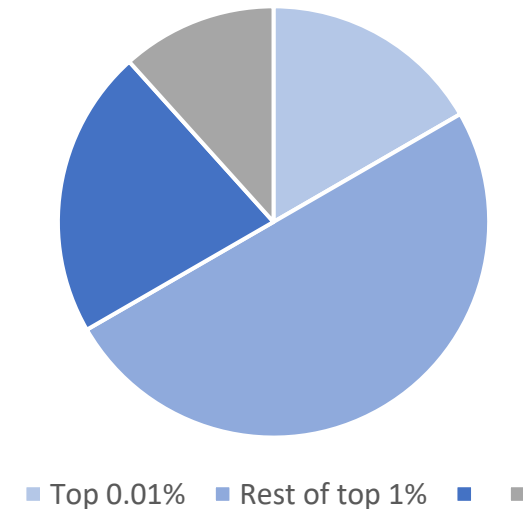
Key Players, and Psychology

Key Players – 6. The Super-rich and their lickspittles

Background

- Income is very unequal, but wealth inequality is 'off the scale' – *far* worse.
 - If you have £800,000 (e.g. an average house without mortgage, plus a pension pot worth £15,000 a year), you are in the Global 1%: [credit-suisse/global-wealth 2022](https://www.credit-suisse.com/global-wealth-2022)
 - If you have £100,000 you are in the global top 1/8 (12.5%)
- Imagine a birthday cake for 8 kids is cut into 8.
- Here's the first slice →
 - Actually, it's the BLUE bit, not the red!
 - So one kid gets almost the whole cake, the next 3 need a fork, the last 4 just get crumbs
- But *within* the top 1/8 (12.5%) wealth is ALSO very skewed, and ditto *within* the top 1%
- So that blue area is not shared out evenly at all!
- By 2030
 - the top 1% (70m) will have 2/3 of the entire pie – mid-blue (They already owned 1/2 in 2018)
 - the top 0.01% (700,000) will hold about 1/4 of that - pale blue
- So 700,000 people have more financial clout than the bottom 7,000,000,000.
- And they chuck a few crumbs to a big chunk of the rest of the top 1%, for help keeping it that way
- The people who call the shots care more about protecting themselves than paying out so others have a habitable planet*

The Top 1% in 2030 (est)



Key Players – 6. The Super-rich and their (other) lickspittles

- They have vastly disproportionate influence and access - to Politicians, rule makers, adjudicators and enforcers, public news, etc
- They can buy, and co-opt, the best talent to promote various protective narratives:
 - Their huge success validates ‘the system’: they **got wealthy by hard work, and you can too!**
 - Really? The US has the biggest concentration of super-rich, and the 2nd highest MEAN average wealth.
 - But US MEDIAN wealth is 18th, below the UK, France, Spain, Italy. I.e. the guy even half-way along the scale does NOT do well.
 - Social mobility in the US and elsewhere is declining, and the US is lower than most of Europe. “Anyone can make it in... Sweden.”
 - They **“generate all the wealth”**
 - Long story, but this is unlikely to be near the truth, and is certainly not proven
 - Not least because inheritance plays a huge part
 - “Our **wealth trickles down**, so benefitting everyone” (demonstrably false)
 - “**Everything is just great**” how it is now (well, they would say that!)
- They can insulate themselves from the rules
 - Lobbyists, PR skills – influencing everything quietly, unattributably
 - Revolving doors (Journalists, Politicians, Board Rooms) – keeping gate-keepers and whistle-blowers onside
 - Investment bankers, the Big 4 Accounting/Tax firms – to globally manage capital protection & concealment, and tax-net design & avoidance
 - Libel Lawyers, .. (“America has the best legal system money can buy.” And likewise in the UK and elsewhere. Law protects privilege & property.)
 - A whole industry devoted to making them idols
 - *“In reality, we see a surprising support of the lifestyles of the very wealthy. People brought up in cultures that idolize the rich often oppose policies to restrict them.” Prof Stefan Gössling, Lund University*
- They have hugely polluting life-styles
 - Yachts (each equating to 1-3 jumbo jets), private jets, multiple mansions, ostentation off the scale, and merchandising to the aspiring..

Despite the manifest obscenity of this

- The Super-rich *themselves* only emit about 3% of the total (30,000 x the average, BUT there are so few of them)
- HOWEVER, their impact on distracting, driving aspiration, and slowing system change, is surely MUCH greater.

Key Players – 6. The Super-rich and their (other) lickspittles – through the lickspittle's eyes



“Yes, the planet got destroyed, but for a beautiful moment in time we created a lot of value for shareholders.”

Key Players – 7. “Big Oil” (incl Gas & Coal)

- FF exploration and production is 2nd largest industry after Telecoms: [The 10 Global Biggest Industries by Revenue - 2023 | IBISWorld](#)
- Revenue = approx \$5 trillion in 2023 (and highly concentrated in few hands)
- Reminder: Subsidised by c \$6tn pa, = \$11 million *per minute*: [Fossil Fuel Subsidies \(imf.org\)](#)
- Will cover in detail next session (*on Misinformation*) but in brief:
 - Sitting on piles of unextracted reserves
 - Which is held on their books as assets, and supports their share prices
 - Which determines the remuneration of senior execs
 - Who therefore are powerfully incentivized to
 - Stop those assets from being “stranded”
 - Keep exploring and developing new fields
 - Awash with cash
 - Very well organised and experienced in operating Politically, Internationally, with some “challenging” regimes
 - So it shouldn’t surprise us that Big Oil and its pals are working in their own interests, against ours, and are very good at it...
- Because they have taken the time to understand how people tick....

Psychology – Introduction

- Most people now accept as true that human activities are warming the planet and this is very bad.
- Yet little is done – Why? We need to understand:
 - How humans think and behave
 - How we are less rational than we think we are
 - We are much more easily influenced than we think (Vance Packard – *The Hidden Persuaders*)
 - The science on this is over 50 years long and increasingly wide and deep
 - The psychology of decision making
 - Behavioural Economics
 - Govts can ‘nudge’ for good, individual politicians can build followings on lies
 - Businesses can use for commercial gain (which can be good *or bad*)
 - When you make a lot of money, you can invest in the best expertise, techniques and campaigns
 - The Fossil Fuel Industry has *a lot* of money...
- Only then can we understand Misinformation (next time)
 - Who’s doing what to whom
 - How

Psychology – What do we say we think? (1)

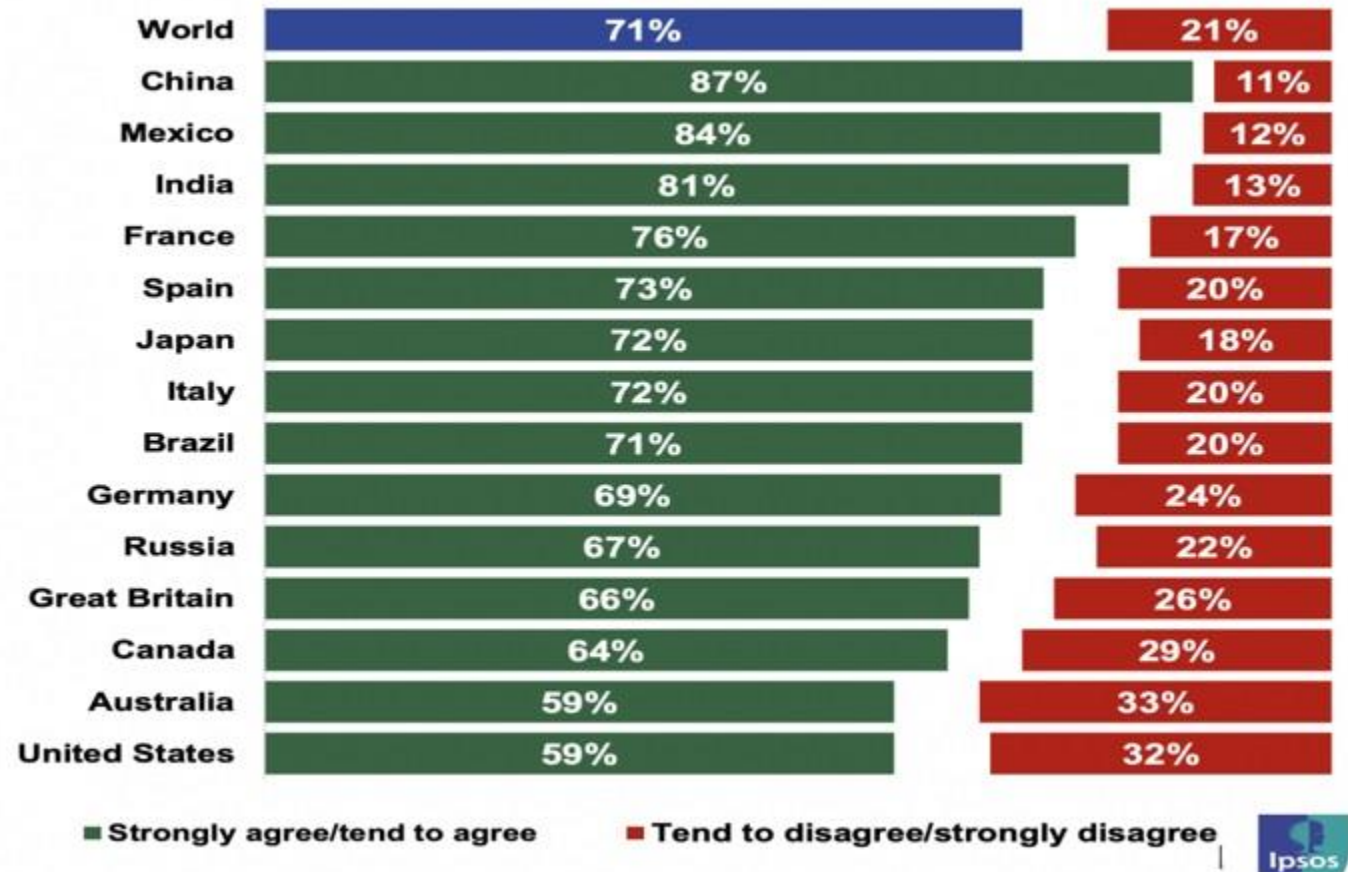
People care about CC, and know it's real and serious

Seriousness of climate change in comparison to Covid-19

Country data

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:

In the long term, climate change is as serious a crisis as Covid-19 is



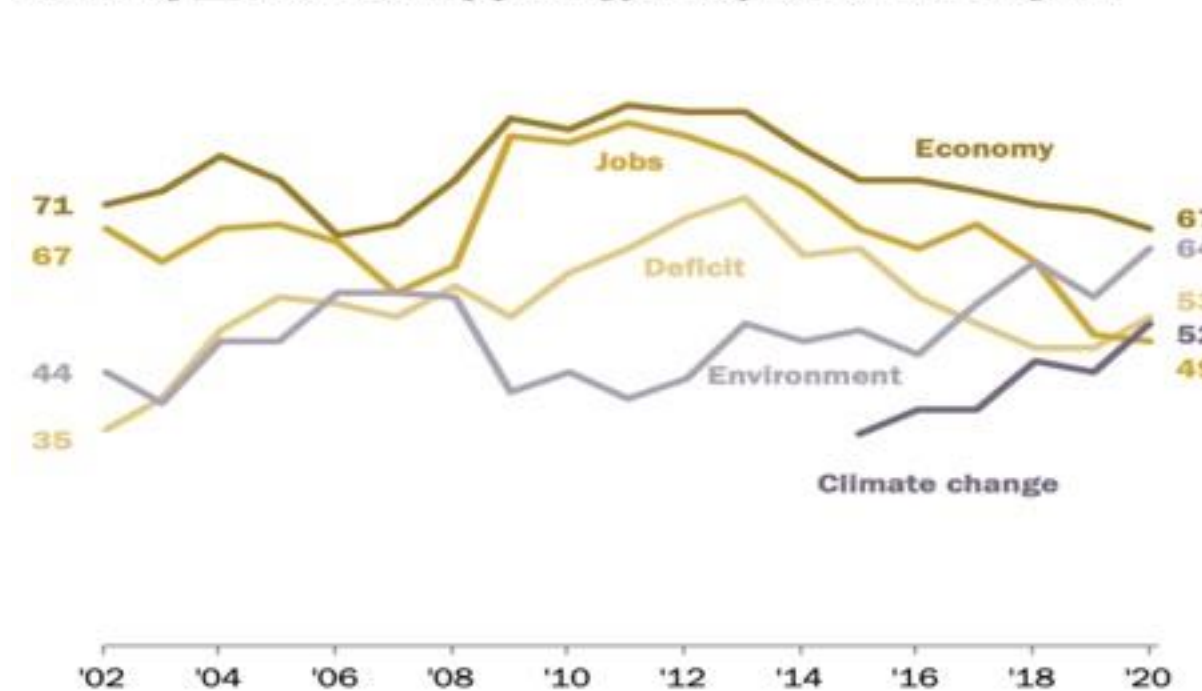
Base: 28,029 online adults aged 16-74;
Fieldwork dates: Thursday 16 to Sunday 19 April.

Psychology – What do we say we think? (2)

But not very much, AND not when things are tough....

For the first time, environmental protection rivals the economy among the public's top policy priorities

% who say ___ should be a top priority for the president and Congress

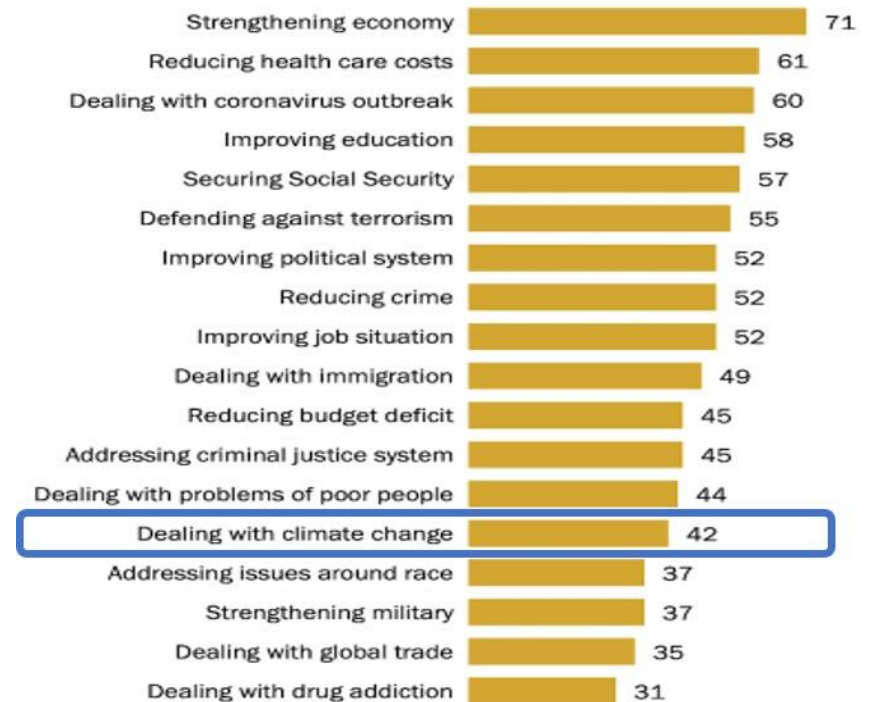


Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 8-13, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Strengthening the economy is public's top concern, followed by cutting health costs, addressing COVID-19

% who say ___ should be a top priority for the president and Congress to address this year



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 10-17, 2022.

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Psychology – How we think – immediacy, proximity, visibility, specificity (to you)

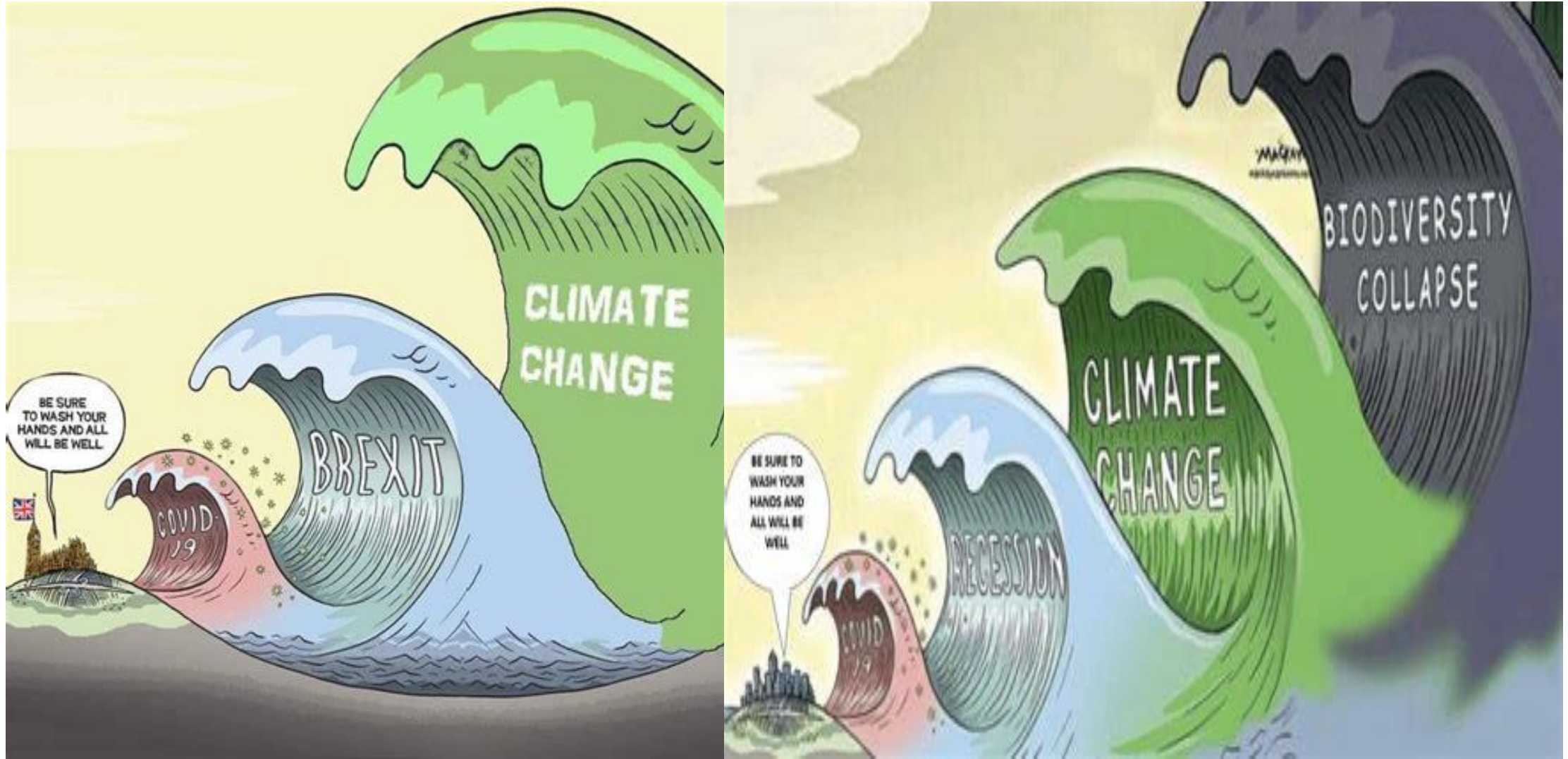
Let's compare three challenges:

Dimension	Lion attacking	Covid	Climate Change
Immediacy in time	High	Moderate	Low
Proximity in space	High	Moderate	Low
Visibility/tangibility	High	Moderate/Low	Low
Specificity (to you)	High	Moderate	Low
Simplicity of solutions	High	Moderate	Low
Attractiveness ('cheapness') of solution	High	Moderate/Low	Low (who wants to change?)



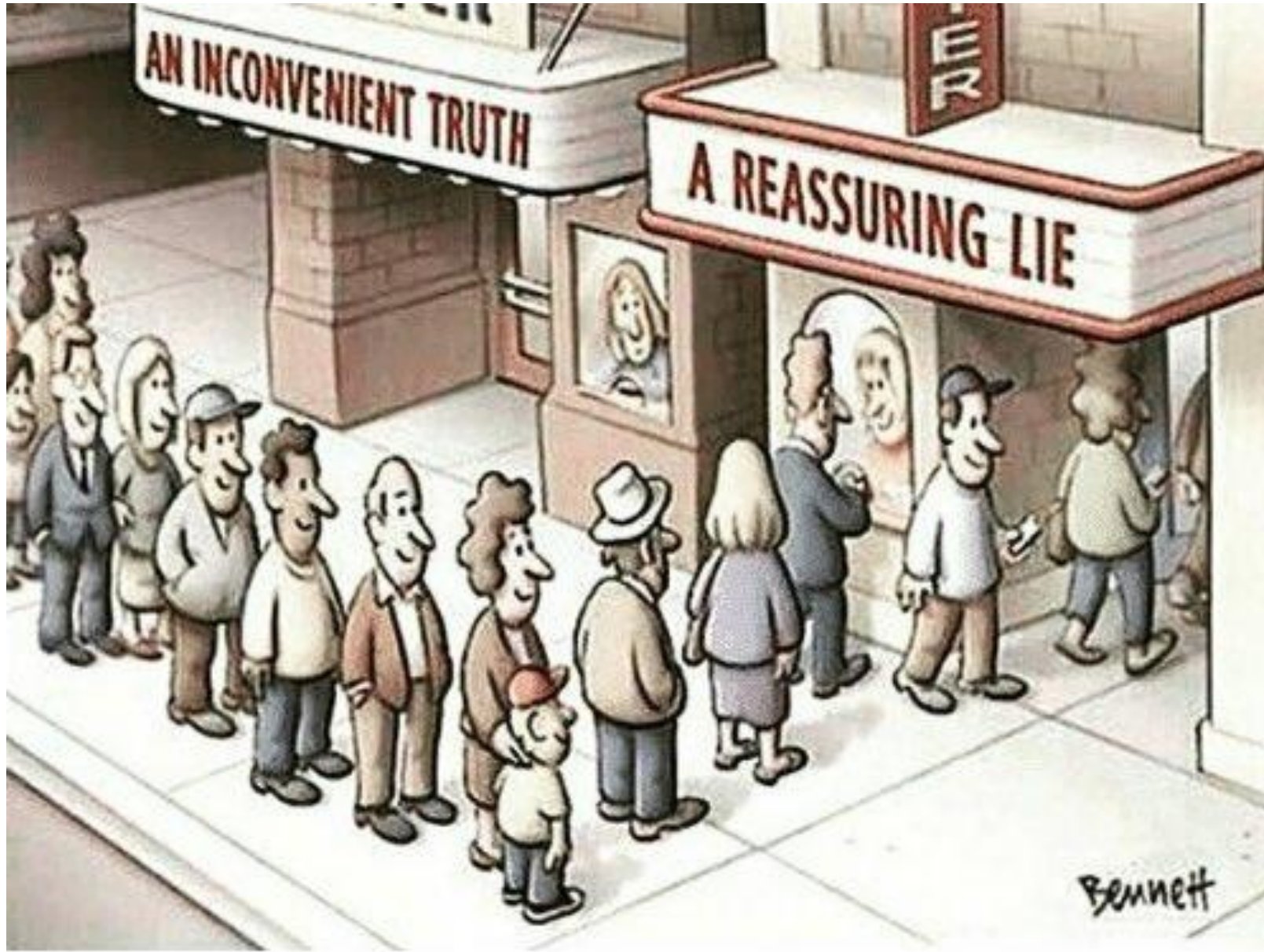
Most of these obstacles are melting slowly
Is 'slowly' fast enough?

Psychology – How we think – immediacy, proximity, visibility, specificity (to you)



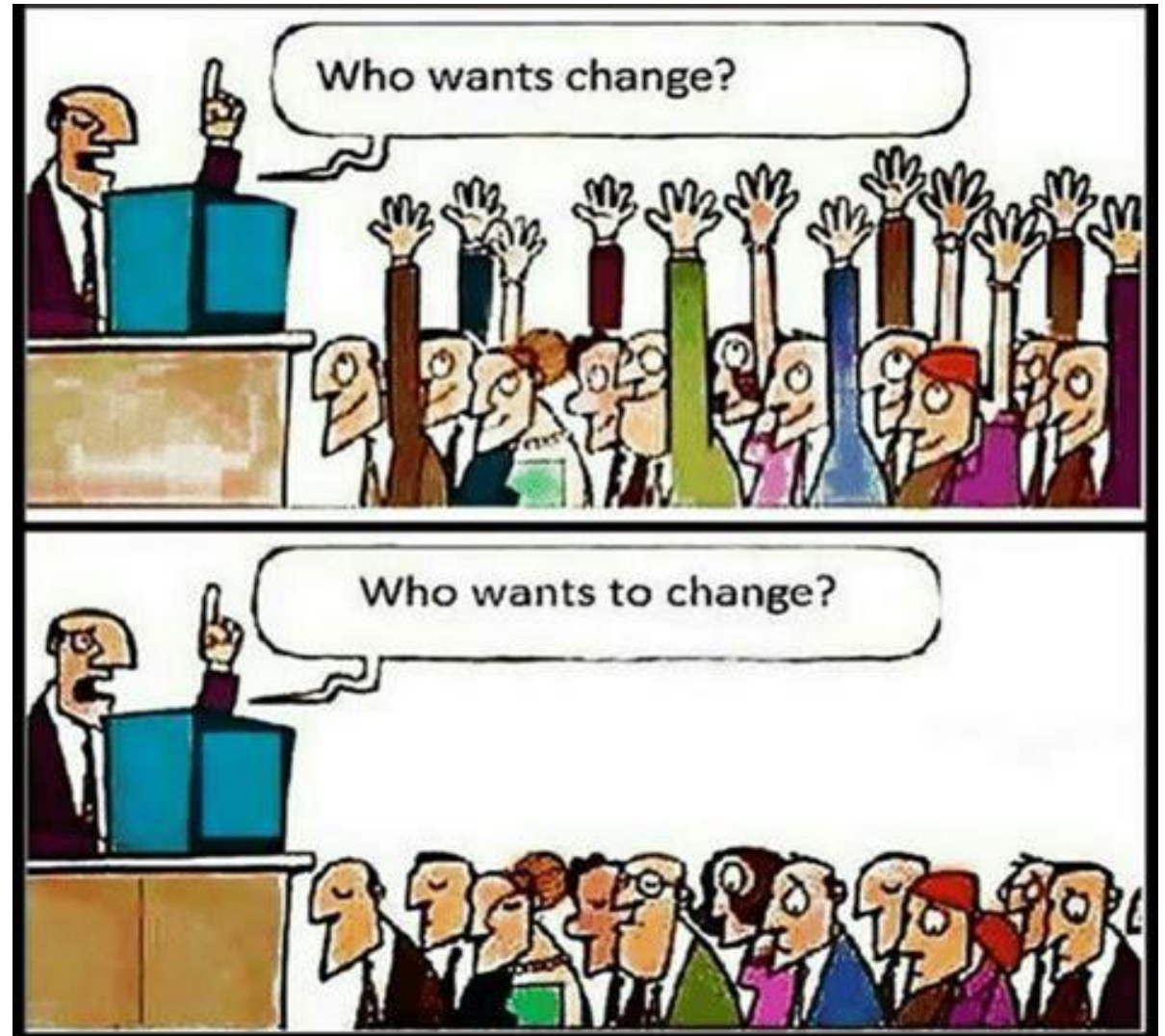
Key Players, and Psychology

Psychology – How we think – we hide from painful thoughts!



Psychology – How we think – the difference between thinking and doing

- *“while climate change remains the most important environmental issue for citizens globally, citizens are no more likely to say they plan to make changes to their own environmental behaviours than they were six years ago.”*
Ipsos, 2000 adults in 29 countries, 02-03/**2020**.
- We get it, but then we go and empty the dishwasher or tidy our sock drawer



Psychology – How we *really* think (1)

- The world is very complex and fluid
- Our role and goals are undefined
 - what are we for/what are we trying to do?
- Any decision we make (including whether to believe X) is made under constraints:
 - imperfect information ~ uncertainty
 - time available
 - processing power
- Hence: Heuristics or “less is more” (Herbert A Simon)
 - E.g. Satisficing
 - Seminal work – [“Judgement under uncertainty” \(Tversky & Kahneman\)](#)
 - Availability – e.g. overestimate likelihood of dying in a dramatic event. Trains 100% heavier than optimal.
 - Representativeness – *is quiet, bookish, shy Tom: a librarian? or an accountant?*
 - Anchoring – basing (numerical) decisions on earlier irrelevant numbers
 - But Heuristics are not rational!

Key Players, and Psychology

Psychology – How we *really* think (2) – an example

Example of Heuristics at work - The *decoy effect*

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2-choice 3-choice

68%

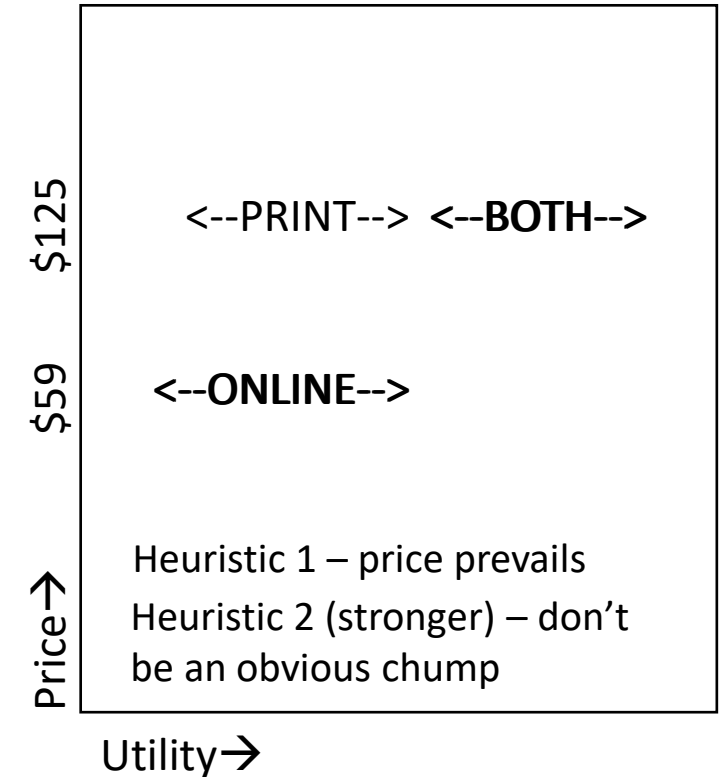
16%

0%

32%

84%

52 points up!



We are not just irrational, we are '*predictably* irrational' (Dan Ariely) We can be *manipulated*! (Who knew)

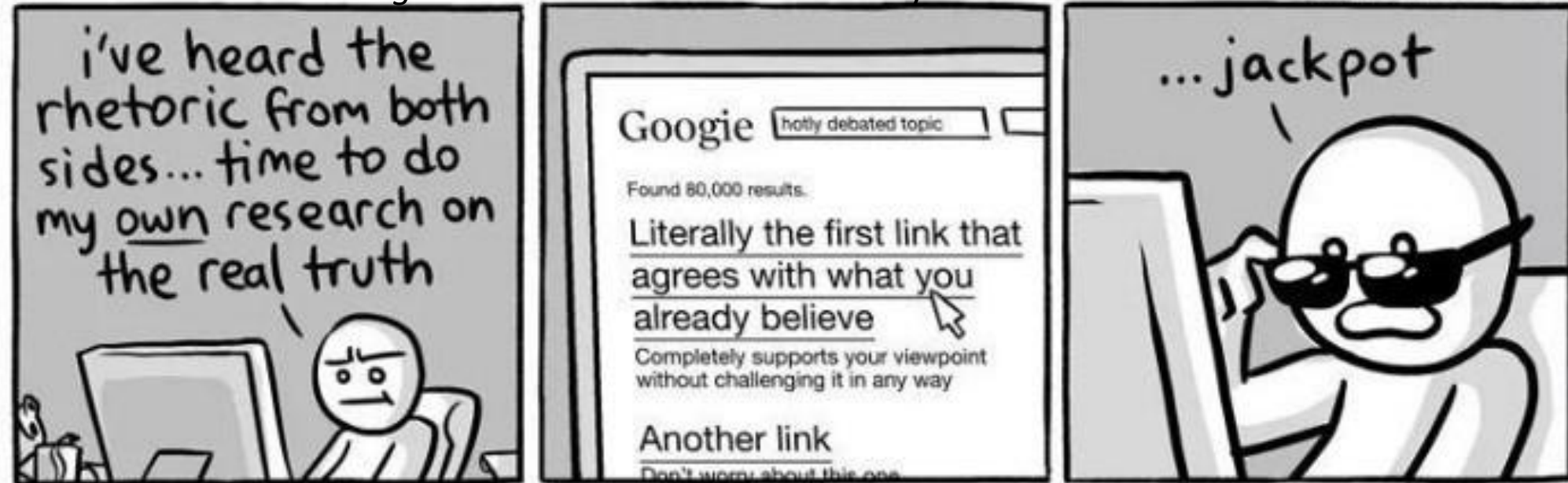
Psychology – How we *really* think (3)

- Lots of unseen influences on our thinking
 - Parole judges – Most important factor is whether they're hungry...
 - Power of persuasion ~ Placebos – *"But I still need those sugar pills!"*
- And then there's Cognitive Dissonance
 - *'Mistakes were made (but not by me)'*: Aronson & Tavris
 - We can't *abide* mental conflict
 - E.g. "I'm a good person, yet I did that bad thing"
 - We can't give up that first belief, so we bend the second till it fits
 - Hence there are always two accounts of any marriage break up
 - "He did me no harm. But I played him an evil trick, and have hated him ever since"
(Pavlovitch, in *The Brothers Karamasov* - Dostoyevski)
- So, to solve the conflict
 - We invent stuff
 - We even bend our memories
 - Which are surprisingly malleable: cf the case of Binyamin Wilkomirski/Bruno Grosjean....
 - But most of all, we far too readily ACCEPT whatever meets our gut-instinct needs →

Key Players, and Psychology

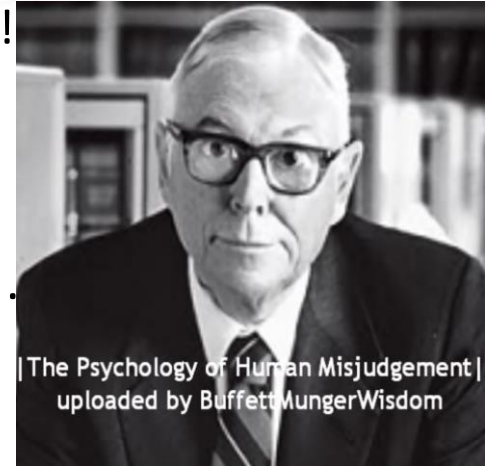
Psychology – How we *really* think (4)

- Our thinking is bent out of shape by many, many distinct Cognitive Biases
- But one of the *strongest* is Confirmation Bias. Have you ever done this?



- Yes (if you're honest)! Did it make you feel better? Yes! Means your instinct was *right*!
- And even worse – you then become 'toughened' against new info:
- *"the human mind is a lot like the human egg, and the human egg has a shut-off device. When one sperm gets in, it shuts down so the next one can't get in."*

Charlie Munger



[The Psychology of Human Misjudgement]
uploaded by BuffettMungerWisdom

Psychology – How Misinformation Works (30,000 ft view)

- So,
 - Our ‘human software’ is full of ‘bugs’
 - Many are ‘hackable’
 - Then the hackers can insert their ‘viruses’! (“Misinformation”)
 - And we don’t feel a thing....
- Which is why we’ll need to get inside the heads of the hackers, and understand how they do it.
- Of course, this is a simplistic account – misinfo is a wider thing than just the creation, or validation, of *false beliefs*. It can also be used to
 - *Confuse* us
 - Persuade us to *change the subject* (all too hard)
- But that’s the whole new topic, for next time....